

Parents in the Criminal Justice System and the Impact on Children and Families



**Prepared for:
Children of Parents in the
Criminal Justice System:
Children at Risk**

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Presentation Overview

- HHS Conference
- Parents in the Criminal Justice System
- Impact of Incarceration on Children
- Reunification Challenges for Families
- Impact on Communities and Roles for Service Systems
- Research and Policy Opportunities



National Policy Conference: Building a Knowledge Base

- National policy conference “From Prison to Home: The Effects of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities”
- Sponsored by HHS/ASPE, held at NIH in 2002
- 10 papers commissioned
- Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities
- Focused on research, policy and program issues at the intersection of health and human services and criminal justice system



Parents in the Criminal Justice System

- 7 million in criminal justice system
 - 3.7 million are parents
- 1.4 million in state and federal prisons
 - > 700,000 are parents
- Average time served = 2.5 years
- Substance abuse histories, health issues
- 40% will be released within a year
- Prison is an opportunity to improve skills, treat addictions, prepare for life on outside



DOC Investments in Supporting Parents

- BJS 2003 (Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities)
 - About half of prisons offer parenting programs
 - 40% of community based facilities offer parenting programs

- NIC 2002 (Services for Families of Prison Inmates)
 - 35% of DOCs have agency-wide policies and programs aimed at benefiting children of inmates
 - 52% report agency-wide policies and programs that help maintain relationships with families



Obstacles to Parent-Child Contact in Prison

- Geographic location of prison facilities
 - Women are housed in prisons an average of 160 miles from their children; men an average of 100 miles
- Inadequate information about visiting procedures
- Intimidating, uncomfortable, and humiliating visiting procedures
- Difficulty scheduling visits
- Family's inability to afford transportation
- Foster parents or caregivers unwilling to facilitate visits
- Expensive long-distance phone charges

***DOC mission = safe and secure environment



Research Suggests Maintaining Contact Can Have Positive Outcomes

- Most incarcerated mothers and fathers want to be good parents
- Maintaining family contact while in prison may improve outcomes
 - Can reduce strain of parental separation
 - Reduce recidivism rates
 - Increase likelihood of successful reentry



Children of Prisoners

- 1.5 million children have a parent incarcerated in state or federal prison
 - 2.1% of all minor children had a parent in state or federal prison
 - 7% of African American children
- 7.3 million children have parent under any justice system supervision:
 - 10% of all minor children

Possible Developmental Effects of Parental Arrest and Incarceration on Children

Developmental State	Developmental Characteristics	Developmental Tasks	Effects of separation
Infancy (0-2 years)	Limited perception, mobility Total dependency	Development of trust and attachment	Impaired parent-child bonding
Early Childhood (2-6 years)	Increased perception, mobility and improved memory Greater exposure to environment. Ability to imagine	Development of sense of autonomy, independence, and initiative	Inappropriate separation anxiety Impaired socio-emotional development Acute traumatic stress reactions and survivor guilt
Middle Childhood (7-10 years)	Increased independence from caregivers and ability to reason Peers become important	Sense of industry Ability to work productively	Developmental regressions Poor self concept Acute traumatic stress reactions Impaired ability to overcome future trauma

Adapted from Katherine Gabel and Denise Johnston, 1997, *Children of Incarcerated Parents*, New York: Lexington Books and with permission from Lexington Books.

Possible Developmental Effects of Parental Arrest and Incarceration on Children

Developmental State	Developmental Characteristics	Developmental Tasks	Effects of separation
Early Adolescence (11-14 years)	<p>Organization of behavior in pursuit of goals</p> <p>Increased abstract thinking Puberty</p> <p>Increased aggression</p>	<p>Ability to work productively with others</p> <p>Control expression of emotions</p>	<p>Rejection of limits on behavior</p> <p>Trauma-reactive behaviors</p>
Late Adolescence (15-18 years)	<p>Emotional crisis and confusion</p> <p>Adult sexual development and sexuality</p> <p>Formal abstract thinking</p> <p>Increased independence</p>	<p>Development of cohesive identity</p> <p>Resolution of conflicts with family and society</p> <p>Ability to engage in adult work and relationships</p>	<p>Premature termination of dependency relationship with parent</p> <p>Intergenerational crime and incarceration</p>

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Children of Prisoners

Loss of a Parent to Prison is often Traumatic

- Loss of a parent is experienced as a traumatic event and may contribute to an unstable environment
- Situations characterized by uncertainty and stress divert a child's energies from developmental tasks
- Children experience the stigma of having a parent in prison
- **In some cases, removing a parent can be beneficial**



Children and Families of Prisoners

What are the Short-Term Consequences?

- **Structural changes**
 - How dramatic this change is depends on caregiving arrangements prior to incarceration
- **Loss of financial support**
 - Incarceration disproportionately affects poorer families
 - Limited access to public benefits
- **Difficulty maintaining ties**
 - Navigating corrections and child welfare systems is complicated



Children of Prisoners

What are the Long-term Outcomes?

- **Little empirical attention to this question**
- **Children of prisoners face a range of negative outcomes**
 - Increased likelihood of depression, low self-esteem and disruptive behavior
 - Increased likelihood of future involvement in the criminal justice system
- **Outcomes are confounded w/ other factors**
 - Their lives are commonly characterized by high levels of poverty, parental substance abuse and mental illness and familial involvement in the criminal justice system



Families of Prisoners

Reunification and Reintegration Challenges

- Families are huge support to returning prisoners
 - housing, financial support, linkages to jobs, emotional support
- But who is family?
 - More likely mother than significant other and/or child
- Rebuilding relationships after separation when family dynamics have changed
 - New relationships
 - Relocation
 - Limited finances
 - Resentment
 - Lack of contact with child
 - More than one child, more than one mother of child
 - Shame/stigma



Other Issues/Barriers to Reunification

- Child Custody Issues
- Child Support

***Reunification is not always the goal
– Family violence



Implications for Communities and Service Organizations

- Large numbers of prisoners are returning to relatively small numbers of neighborhoods
 - In Brooklyn, 50% of parolees live in 10% of the neighborhoods
 - In Pittsburg, 75% of returning prisoners live in 25% of neighborhoods
- These communities often struggle with high rates of unemployment, crime, drug use, and poverty



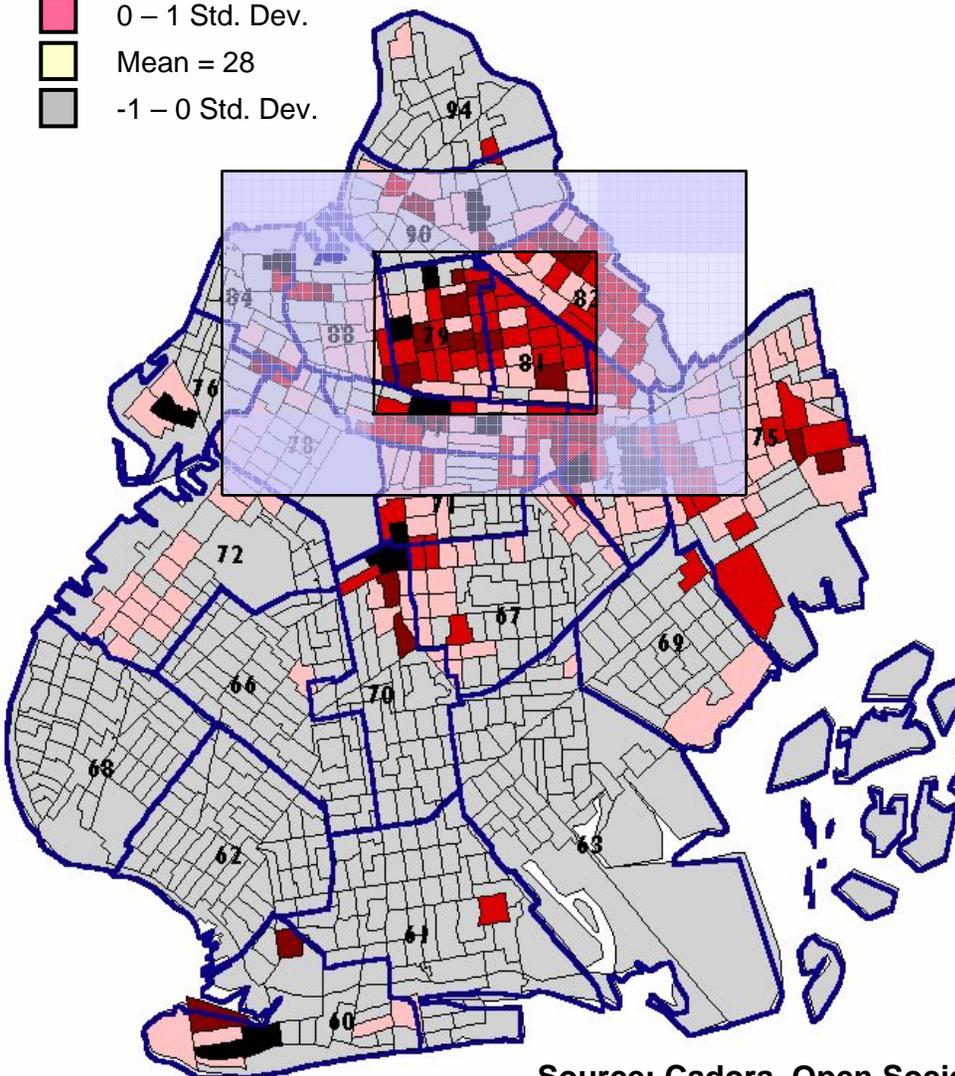
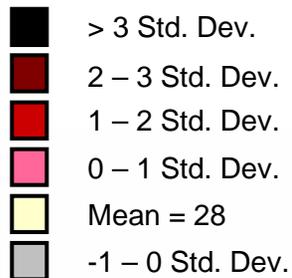
Implications for Communities and Service Organizations

- Individuals under criminal justice supervision also receiving services from HS agencies
- Allegheny County: 66% of former prisoners have received services from DHS. Of those:
 - 41% receive drug and alcohol services
 - 63% receive mental health treatment
 - 20% receive both
 - 24% served by more than one DHS program office

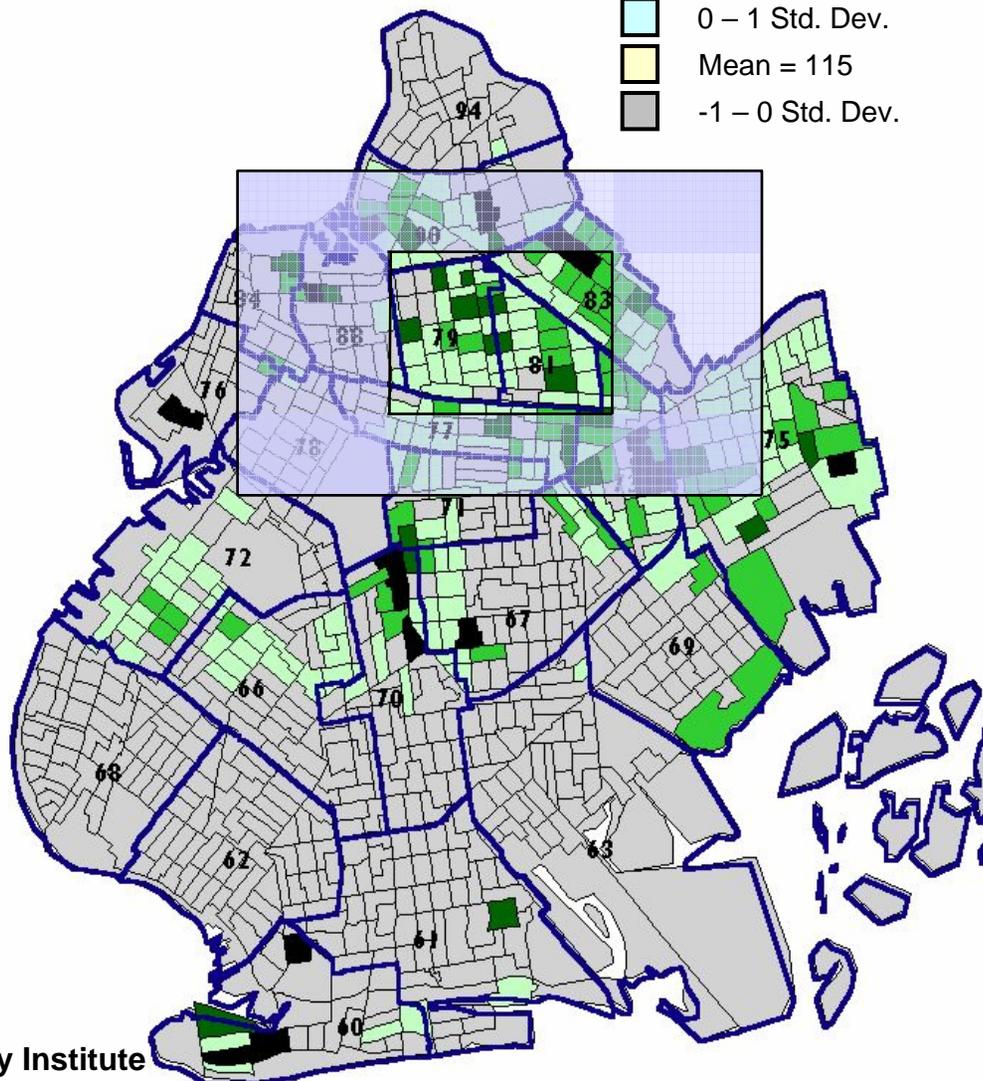
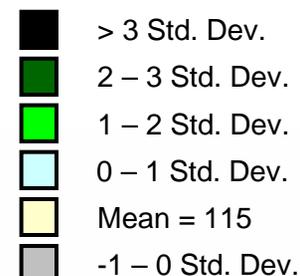
Criminal Justice and Needs Based Program Populations

Brooklyn, NY

Incarcerated Parents (1 Yr)



Children Under 18 on PA



Source: Cadora, Open Society Institute



Challenges Are Great ... But So Too are the Opportunities

Momentum is Encouraging

- Today's conference
- Federal attn/grants re: healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, mentoring children of prisoners
- Second Chance Act
- *Re-Entry Policy Council* Children and Families Project
- Pittsburg Initiative and others...
- Returning Home Study

- ...MORE



Research Opportunities

Key Questions...

What are the effects of:

- **Parental criminality, arrest, incarceration, reentry and community supervision on children?**
- **Parental involvement and familial relationships on adult recidivism, employment, health and other outcomes?**
- **Marriage on individual and child outcomes?**
- **High rates of incarceration on family and community stability?**
- **Various human services and corrections policies on children and families?**

Research Opportunities

...Will Require Prospective, Longitudinal Studies that

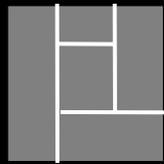
- **Follow families at risk**
- **Develop and use multidisciplinary approaches**
- **Use developmentally appropriate, standardized measures for assessing children and adolescents**
- **Address the effects of mother versus father incarceration, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and individual, family, contextual and cultural processes**



Policy Opportunities

- Given large and growing vulnerable population at stake
 - Better prepare prisoners for release
 - Support family ties while incarcerated
 - Screen for flags when reunification is not the goal

- Given that multiple systems already work with many of the families
 - Strategically coordinate and collaborate to achieve shared goals of improved family well-being and community health

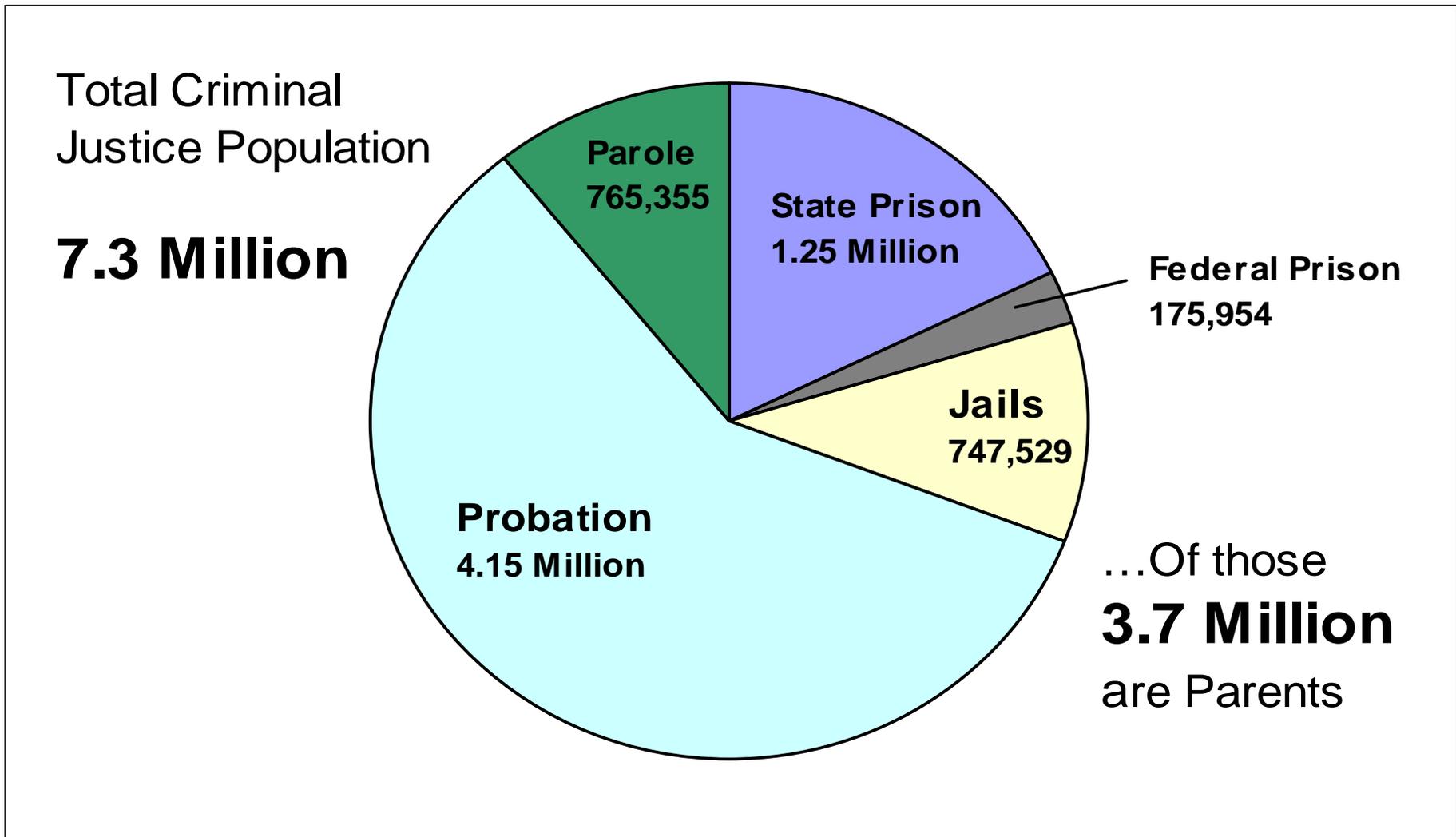


**To access the papers commissioned for the “From
Prison to Home” conference, see www.urban.org
or
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/prison2home02/index.htm>**

**To receive email updates of JPC research, send an
email to jpc@ui.urban.org**



Parents in the Criminal Justice System At a Glance



Source: Mumola (2002), "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." Presentation at the National Center for Children and Families. 10/31/02